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ABSTRACT

As part of its peer tutor training program, the writing/reading center at a Massachusetts University conducts a videotape production workshop in which experienced tutors plan, write, and act in a video script used for training new tutors. To proceed with such a program requires no professional skills or special talents, but a television studio must be available, and the program director should have a sense of audience, organization, and time management. The capabilities of the filming facilities as well as the size of the group in the program should be assessed and a schedule determined. Participants in the film can write their own parts so that they can develop their own roles. The script should be written collaboratively and should be complete and well-planned. Time should be allowed for two or three rehearsals so that the group can make minor changes and get a feel for the script. Some artwork and music may also be necessary for the tape. The production should be kept as simple as possible. Among the problems the director and group should be aware of are that (1) it may take longer than expected to put together a 15- to 20-minute film, (2) personality conflicts may arise among participants, (3) scheduling may be difficult when working with students, and (4) the tutors may also become dissatisfied and discouraged as work progresses. However, the benefits of such a program make the time and energy expended worth the effort. The tutors become more aware of how they come across to students, and consequently strive to improve the quality of their tutoring. (HTH)

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TRAINING PEER TUTORS USING VIDEO

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Abstract

As part of its peer tutor training program, the Southeastern Massachusetts University Writing/Reading Center conducts a "Video Tape Production" workshop, in which experienced tutors plan, write, and act in a video script used for training new tutors. Although producing the program has many benefits for those involved in the project and for its intended audience--the new tutors--it does not require that the participants have special skills or talents. It does, however, require enthusiasm and hard work. Some practical advice and suggestions for avoiding problems that may arise can ensure that this project runs smoothly. But despite the time and energy needed to develop this program, it is an efficient, creative, and challenging way to train peer tutors.

TRAINING PEER TUTORS USING VIDEO

There are many lessons that those of us who conduct peer tutor training programs can learn from human resources management. In recent years, managers have become concerned with the needs of their employees as it has become evident that satisfied workers usually are productive and increase the profits of a business. Frederick Herzberg, originator of the Motivation-Hygiene Theory, which he discusses in Work and the Nature of Man (New York:World Publishing Co., 1966), suggests that interesting work, achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, and growth stimulate people to do high quality work. Creative managers in business and industry recognize the value of Herzberg's theory and use it as the basis of job training programs to motivate their employees.

Although those of us in education may find this approach crass and materialistic, we can learn a great deal from the better personnel management models in the commercial world. We can train students to become good tutors by providing them with learning experiences that contribute to their growth and development and by giving them the opportunities for achievement, recognition, responsibility, and advancement that Herzberg suggests. New tutors need to learn about their duties and responsibilities, the available resources, establishing relationships with their students, and working within the organization. But merely training tutors when they first begin to work doesn't ensure that they will continue to remember and practice what they learned early in their jobs. Therefore, an ongoing training program that allows everyone to grow and to maintain a high level of tutoring is necessary.

The SMU Peer Tutoring Training Program

At the Southeastern Massachusetts University Writing/Reading Center, such a program has been established by conducting a variety of training workshops for tutors. Each tutor is required to attend one of the following workshops for an entire semester: "Tutoring Methods," "Helping Students with Essay Writing," "Helping Students with Reading and Study Skills," "Grammar for Tutoring," "English as a Second Language," "Journal Writing," "Using the Library as a Resource," "Helping Skills for Tutoring," and "Video Tape Production."

Because the "Video Tape Production" workshop makes use of the key motivators suggested by Herzberg, this part of the training program has been particularly successful, useful, and interesting. In this workshop, experienced tutors plan, write, and act in a video script to be used for training new tutors. The objectives of this workshop are to give the participants the opportunity to share their expertise with others; to learn new skills, such as working in video, script writing, acting, and producing; to discuss and evaluate their tutoring methods; to let new tutors learn from experienced tutors; to make new tutors feel that they are part of an important and organized program; to give them insight into the demands of tutoring; to acquaint them with both bad and good tutoring practices; to provide flexibility in the training program; and to offer training in a visual and entertaining manner.

Requirements for Producing a Video Training Program

Production of a video tape training program requires no professional skills or special talents except for the actual filming. A TV studio must, of course, be available, with a staff that is

patient and willing to work with non-professionals. Most secondary and post- secondary schools have such facilities. The tutors who work on this project need not be communications majors nor need they have had any prior acting experience. The director/producer needs no special expertise in film-making, script writing, or media. The groups that worked on the Southeastern Massachusetts University video tapes included English, biology, political science, and business majors, none of whom-- including the director--had ever attempted a project of this type. In fact, one of the positive outcomes of this venture was that everyone learned together, helped each other, and developed new bonds and working relationships with the other group members, which continued beyond the duration of this project. The only requirement for tutors is enthusiasm and willingness to work hard because they will have to spend a considerable amount of time on this project.

The director should have a sense of audience, organization, and time management. For example, the director must remind the group about the needs of the audience and how to use the video tape most effectively, since an audience watching a TV screen will not be satisfied with information that could have been printed in a pamphlet. If that is all they get, they will be disappointed and stop paying attention to the material, no matter how significant it is. The director must also be able to divide the project into small tasks, to distribute the work fairly and equitably, and to guide and encourage the tutors. It is essential that the director keep the project moving along because although an entire semester seems like a long time, it is easy to get bogged down. Therefore, the director's major role should be setting a schedule, making certain that it is adhered to in a reasonable manner, and ensuring that the project is completed.

Some Practical Advice

At this point some practical advice on how to proceed with such a project is in order. First, find out about the capabilities of the filming facilities that you plan to use and how the studio schedules filming sessions. Get the participants' schedules and find out whether they can all get together for several hours for filming without interfering with their classes, jobs, and private lives. Sometimes, you will need to plan the filming in sections and work out a script that lends itself to having part of the group do one section, the other part do another section. The TV studio personnel can also give you advice and make suggestions for the production end of the project.

Next determine the size of the group. Generally speaking, four or five people seem the best. Less than four puts too much of a burden on the members and limits the sharing. More than five develops logistical problems of scheduling meeting times and creates a management problem.

Although the group should do its own planning and decide on the content of the program, it saves time at the beginning stages of the project if you have in mind some overall purpose for the use of the video tape. Some direction, such as producing a tape for training new tutors, can save hours of discussion and allow the members of the group to get right to the heart of the matter: what should new tutors know? How this material will be presented must also be decided. Role playing or short skits can illustrate approaches to tutoring, and an overplayed wrong way to tutor provides action, humor, and an attention-getting device which makes new tutors aware of some of the things that can go wrong in a tutoring session. This format works

particularly well with five people because two different role playing situations can be developed. Two participants can be students who are tutored by two other members of the group. The fifth person can be the narrator.

Participants write their own parts, so that they can develop their own roles. Writing sessions are a major activity for this project. Because the writing usually takes longer than anticipated, it is important that people who work together have schedules that allow them ample opportunity to meet to complete their part of the script. As the participants write the script, they should avoid long speeches because they become boring to the audience, slow down the action of the piece, and are more difficult to perform than short dialogue segments.

The script should be written out completely to ensure that it is well planned and professional, that the participants have something to fall back on if they forget their lines during the performance, and that the TV studio personnel will know the best way to film the tape. Writing out the script also allows the other members of the group to make suggestions for improvements, which will not only make a better tape, but will also promote interaction between group members, an important aspect of this project. After a critiquing session, participants should be allowed time to incorporate suggestions into their scripts.

Time should be allowed for two or three rehearsals, so that the group can make minor changes and get a feel for the whole script. More rehearsals are neither feasible nor productive, for this part of the production process takes place near the end of the semester when tutors are completing their own course assignments and studying for

exams. Besides, too many rehearsals make the simulated tutoring sessions appear too studied and make the activity a drudgery. The participants should try to memorize as much of the script as possible, especially the narrator, so that they will not have to keep looking down at the script during the performance.

Some art work and music are also necessary for the tape. The title of program, the credits, and any information needing emphasis can be put on small placards. Check with the TV studio about details, and enlist the help of artistic students or the art department. Introductory and concluding music makes the production more professional. The group can select its own piece, but the TV studio can probably recommend background music.

And finally, keep the production as simple as possible. There is enough potential for difficulties to develop without building them into the script.

Problems That May Arise

Anyone undertaking a project to produce a videotape program with peer tutors should be aware of problems that may arise in the process. First, it takes longer than one might think to put together a fifteen to twenty minute program using peer tutors. If the tape is to be completed within a semester, start it by the first or second week, and complete as much of the work as possible early in the semester before the tutors are loaded down with their own class work. It is important for the director to keep the project on schedule, as it becomes easy to get bogged down in discussions, stuck in parts of the scriptwriting, and too concerned about creating a masterpiece. The director's role is to keep the group on target and to make sure the objective of producing a tape is accomplished.

Another problem that can develop is personality conflicts among the participants. It is important that the tutors who work together be compatible and that the director be on hand to listen to complaints, smooth ruffled feathers, and make sure that each group member pulls his or her weight.

Scheduling may also be difficult when working with students. This can include finding a time for weekly meetings to work on the project, matching up tutors who will have time to work together in addition to weekly meetings, and scheduling a time for taping.

As the work progresses, tutors sometimes become dissatisfied and discouraged. They feel that what they are doing is not good enough, and once again the director has to be available to suggest ways in which to improve the script and to encourage the tutors.

Finally, the tutors need to realize that when they are being taped, every gesture and sound they make is picked up. They should try to avoid those little things that are usually not noticed in ordinary life, such as scratching one's nose, adjusting one's hair, or tapping one's foot.

Benefits of Producing the Program

If it takes so much time and energy to produce a tape which runs no longer than twenty minutes, is it really worth the effort? The answer is definitely yes because of the benefits to both staff and students. Tutors who work on the project become better tutors, are given new responsibility and recognition, are given the opportunity to achieve and to grow, and feel better about tutoring. As they work on these tapes, the tutors become more aware of how they tutor and how they come across to their students, decide what are the most important ingredients of being a good tutor, define a tutor's role, clarify what

they know, and find ways of sharing this knowledge with other students.

Despite the fact that these tutors have to work harder and longer on the video tape than the other tutors do on their training workshops, they all like the responsibility and the recogniton that come with this project. They feel special to be part of a group that has to develop and complete a product in which they are role models for other tutors, and they feel that it teaches them to get a job done, an asset for future employment. Although many jokes are made about the performance itself, and tutors are dissatisfied with how they look on TV, they do enjoy the fact that they have been able to make a permanent contribution to the Center.

The project also allows the experienced tutors to continue to grow and develop. They improve their own writing, communications, and interpersonal skills. They learn how to work as a team, write a script, act, and work in media. In addition, it gives them the opportunity to be creative.

Finally, it makes the participants feel good to be tutors at the Center. It gives their tutoring renewed energy and vitality, it allows them to get to know the other tutors well, and they enjoy the work because it's fun.

For new tutors, the video tape program demonstrates what happens on the job, suggests some opportunities for growth and development, and provides a positive view of the work. It shows that a tutoring session must be informal but have structure, that the tutor must control the session but not dominate it, that tutoring is not easy and even experienced tutors have problems. The video tapes supplement the tutoring sessions that new tutors are required to observe. Seeing

experienced tutors in these demonstration roles having the responsibility of developing a training program suggests to new tutors some of the opportunities available for their own growth and development as tutors. Using experienced tutors as trainers is also an extension of the peer helping concept which operates between tutors and students. The tutors on the tapes are no experts, but they are sharing their experiences with those who have less experience.

These tapes are useful because they are a convenient way of getting the same information to all new tutors without requiring them to attend a meeting at a designated time, and they enjoy watching them. They can also be used for workshops as a basis for discussions of tutoring practices or to get tutors started in talking about some of their apprehensions about tutoring or problems they have already encountered. Since everyone has watched them, they can be referred to in any discussions about tutoring.

Of course, the real value of the video tapes is the benefit to the students who are being tutored. Although how it helps them cannot be measured quantitatively, there are indications that the quality of tutoring has improved. Tutors have become more aware of their students' problems and how to deal with them. Tutors pay more attention to diagnosis, have more control of the session, are getting their students to do more of the work, ask more questions instead of rushing in and "fixing" the student's work, and take their work more sericusly.

The "Video Tape Production" workshop is an efficient, creative, and challenging way to train peer tutors. It provides tutors with the opportunities for achievement, advancement, recognition, responsibility, and growth that Herzberg suggests motivates people to do high quality work.